

History 615—007:
Political Economy of the Gilded Age
Spring 2012

Professor D. Michael Bottoms
Thurs. 7:20-10:00pm
Office: Robinson B 375B
Office Hours: Tues. 12:00-1:00pm, Thurs. 5:00-6:00pm (and by appointment)
Office Phone: None (Budget Cuts)
Email: mbottoms@gmu.edu

Course Description

The era Mark Twain sarcastically dubbed “The Gilded Age” witnessed a thorough and complete transformation of American society and economy. In the three decades following the Civil War, an economy driven by small, independent producers was replaced by one dominated by large-scale industrial corporations. Captains of industry and a rising middle class benefited mightily from rapidly rising incomes. Meanwhile, laborers who had carefully nurtured dreams of economic independence more often found themselves trapped in a lifetime of wage labor as members of a new and permanently proletarian working class. In the countryside, American farmers watched helplessly as their wealth and status declined under the weight of increasingly competitive world markets. At the same time, America became urban, and the nation's growing cities filled with millions of immigrants. In short during the Gilded Age, America became modern. In this course we will trace the wrenching economic and social upheaval Americans faced in the aftermath of the Civil War, and the strategies they developed to deal with them. We will pay particular attention to those strategies that exposed the fundamental tension between demands for economic liberty and desires for political equality.

Course Requirements:

In-Class Presentation: 20%
Book Reviews: 10%
Final Essay: 50%
Participation: 20%

Written Assignments:

- *Book Reviews:* : During the term, you will be required to write reviews of two of the assigned books. One review will focus on the book assigned for the week you will lead discussion (discussed below), and one response will focus on a week of your choice. These responses should be modeled on brief book reviews of the sort found in professional journals such as *The American Historical Review* and *The Journal of American History*. The reviews should accomplish three goals: first, the argument presented in the book should be clearly and succinctly expressed; second, the argument presented in the book should be placed within its larger historiographical context; third, the argument presented in the book should be evaluated in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, the responses **MUST BE NO LONGER THAN ONE, SINGLE-SPACED PAGE**
- *Final Essay:* You will be required to write a 20-25 page historiographical essay on a topic of your choosing, in consultation with me.

In-Class Presentation:

Each of you will be required to lead the discussion in one of our weekly meetings, either individually or as part of a team, depending upon enrollment. This will entail identifying themes in the readings, linking those themes with discussions from previous weeks, and developing questions designed to explore those themes and elicit vigorous discussion.

Rules for Submission and Formatting:

All papers must use 1-inch margins, and 12-point, Times New Roman font. All written work for this course should be submitted via email attachment to mbottoms@gmu.edu.

IN CASE OF INCLEMENT WEATHER

Upon occasion the university is forced to either open late or cancel classes altogether. There are several ways to learn about the status of the university during such times. You may:

- Check the university's main Home Page at www.gmu.edu for updates
- Check your Mason email account for Mason Alerts and for messages from me
- Call the university's main switchboard at 703-993-2474

In rare instances, I may be forced to cancel class for weather related reasons even if the university is open for classes. In such instances, I will send out a group email at least one hour before class begins.

Required Texts:

- Beckert, Sven. *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896*. Cambridge University Press, 2003. (ISBN: 0521524105)
- Bense, Richard Franklin. *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877*. Cambridge University Press, 1991. (ISBN: 0521398177)
- Cohen, Nancy. *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2002. (ISBN: 0807853542)
- Edwards, Rebecca. *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1997. (ISBN: 0807853542)
- Jr, Robert C. McMath. *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898*. 1st ed. Hill and Wang, 1993. (ISBN: 0374522642)
- McGerr, Michael E. *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1988. (ISBN: 0195054245)
- Montgomery, David. *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*. Cambridge University Press, 1989. (ISBN: 0521379822)
- Novak, William J. *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1996. (ISBN: 0807846112)
- Roy, William G. *Socializing Capital*. Princeton University Press, 1999. (ISBN: 069101034X)
- Welke, Barbara Young. *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*. Cambridge University Press, 2001. (ISBN: 0521649668)
- White, Richard. *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. (ISBN: 0393061264)
- Woodward, C. Vann. *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*. Revised. Louisiana State University Press, 1972. (ISBN: 0807100196)
- Zunz, Olivier. *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920*. University Of Chicago Press, 1992. (ISBN: 0226994600)

* **Note:** This syllabus is a working document and is subject to change. Any and all changes will, of course, be widely and repeatedly advertised.

Lectures and Readings:

Week I: Introduction

Thurs. 1/26

Readings:

- Richard Schneirov, “Thoughts on Periodizing the Gilded Age: Capital, Accumulation, Society, and Politics, 1873-1898.” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 5:3 (July 2006): 189-224.

Week II: Liberalism in the Gilded Age

Thurs. 2/2

Readings:

- Nancy Cohen, *The Reconstruction of American Liberalism, 1865-1914*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Gerald Berk, “Corporate Liberalism Reconsidered: A Review Essay.” *Journal of Policy History* 3:1 (1991): 70-84.

Week III: Corporate Culture

Thurs. 2/9

Readings:

- William G. Roy, *Socializing Capital*. Princeton University Press, 1999.

Week IV: Corporate Growth

Thurs. 2/16

Readings:

- Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920*. University Of Chicago Press, 1992.

Week V: Nineteenth-Century Regulation
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Thurs. 2/23

Readings:

- William J. Novak, *The People's Welfare: Law and Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America*. The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Michael Les Benedict, "Laissez-Faire and Liberty: A Re-evaluation of the Meaning and Origins of Laissez-Faire Constitutionalism." *Law and History Review* 3:2 (1985): 293-331.

Week VI: Rise of the Modern State
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Thurs. 3/1

Readings:

- Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Week VII: Railroads

Thurs. 3/8

Readings:

- Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2011.
- Henry George, "What the Railroad Will Bring Us." *The*

Week VIII: Spring Break

Thurs. 3/15

Readings:

- **Spring Break—No Class**

Week IX: Railroads and Rights

Thurs. 3/22

Readings:

- Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Charles Francis Adams, Jr. and Henry Adams, *Chapters of Erie and Other Essays* (excerpts)

Week X: The New South

Thurs. 3/29

Readings:

- C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*.

Week XI: Populism

Thurs. 4/5

Readings:

- Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898*.

- Robert C. McMath, Jr. et. al. “Agricultural History” Roundtable on Populism.” *Agricultural History* 82:1 (Winter 2008): 1-35.
- William Jennings Bryan, “The Cross of Gold Speech”

Week XII: Class

Thurs. 4/12

Readings:

- Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896*.
- Andrew Carnegie, “The Gospel of Wealth.” *North American Review* CCCXCI (June 1889).
- William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other*. (excerpts)

Week XIII: Labor

Thurs. 4/19

Readings:

- David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925*.
- Henry Demarest Lloyd, *Wealth Against Commonwealth* (excerpts)

Week XIV: Reformulating Masculinity and Femininity

Thurs. 4/26

Readings:

- Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1997.
- Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920.” *The*

American Historical Review 89:3 (June 1984): 620–647.

Week XV: Political Apathy

Thurs. 5/3

Readings:

- Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928*. Oxford University Press, USA, 1988.
- Worth Robert Miller, “The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics.” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1:1 (Jan. 2002): 49–67.

Final Essay Due: